

No 36.

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An Essay
on

Dyspepsia

by John Harris of Pennsylvania
Dated 19th March 1816

1830

The End

of the

to the House of Representatives
March 1830

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An Essay
on
Dyspepsia

It has been said, and not without good reason, that for one new truth given to the world by theoretical writers, there are ten falsehoods: how cautious then ought we not to be in advancing opinions which may affect the health and lives of our fellow creatures!

A sense of the danger attending a deviation from the beaten path, in medical science, would alone be sufficient to deter me from offering sentiments at variance with those which have received the sanction of men of eminence in our profession — but when I call to mind that the foundation of all theory must be facts, it appears that to offer such sentiments would be highly presumptuous in one so inexperienced. Nor do I even

propos to place in a clearer light, or lay down²
in more impressive language, opinions which
I consider as already established - To produce an
essay so free from gross error, as to escape the con-
demnation of those who are my judges, will be to
equal my expectation. — This acknowledgment
is pardonable in one, whom, not the "partiality
of friends," not his own vanity, nor any thing short
of the unbending rules of this institution, and a
prospect of the high honors, which depend upon a
compliance with them, could induce to become
an author. —

In deciding upon a proper subject
for a dissertation I have experienced much anxiety.
Having for several years been the inmate of a
gentleman much harassed with dyspepsia, that
disease presented itself to my mind as one of
the most obstinate and distressing to which the human
system is subject, and on that account, as one having
a strong claim upon my attention. It is

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a disease to which men are liable at all periods of life in all climates and in every state of society.

~~Here~~ our country, from the growing prevalence of luxury and dissipation, its prevalence too is increasing - That it is not much more frequent in all countries, is matter of surprise to us when we reflect how many concurrent circumstances are necessary to the healthy performance of digestion.

The food must be in proper quantity and of proper quality, mastication must be duly performed, the secretion of saliva must be healthy and uninterrupted, and the stomach pancreas and liver must all perform their respective functions with constancy and vigor. The stomach to which the office of digestion more exclusively belongs, is frequently thrown into disorder, in consequence of the intimate sympathy, which subsists between it and every other part of the body: and from the same cause it arises that this morbid influence, is again reflected upon the

assistant organs of digestion, and other parts of the
frame; so that ultimately the whole system becomes
diseased or from defect of nourishment debilitated.

Thus, the different organs, which in health mutu-
ally support each other, when diseased, withdraw
that support, or exert a deleterious influence.

Dr Cullen has placed dyspepsia under
his class Neuroses, and order Adynamia. Its name
derived from the Greek word *δυσ* badly, or with difficul-
ty & *πεψιν* to concoct, was suggested by the physiological
views which were entertained of the process of digestion.

It is sufficiently expressive to render unnecessary a
definition. Its application however is restricted by
Nosologists to those cases in which the stomach is
the original seat of disease. Although disorder of
the liver or other organs may induce a state of dis-
ease in which the most pressing symptoms are those
of indigestion; yet as those cases can only be cured by
an attention to the primary disease, they should be
designated by different names, for too often in

containing a list of names as follows

our treatment of diseases are we guided by⁵
their names, instead of by the History of their
symptoms.

The symptoms of dyspepsia are, anorexia, flatulency, eructations mostly acid, squeamishness, nausea, vomiting, spasmodic pain of the stomach, or when empty a gnawing pain, fixed pain referred to the lower end of the sternum, aversion from exercise, general debility, and emaciation, sallowness of countenance or after a meal flushing, vertigo, small & slow pulse easily quickened by exercise, terrifying dreams, and obstinate costiveness or diarrhoea. There sometimes occurs in this disease a peculiar state of mind denominated vapors which is thus described by Dr. Cullen -

"A languor, listlessness, or want of resolution and activity with respect to all undertakings: a disposition to seriousness, sadness and timidity: as to all future events an apprehension of the worst or most unhappy state of them; and therefore



fore often upon slight grounds, an apprehension⁶
of great evil. Such persons are particularly
attentive to the state of their own health, feeling
the smallest change of feeling in their bodies,
and from any unusual feeling, perhaps of the
slightest kind they apprehend great danger, and
even death itself. In respect to all these feelings and
apprehensions there is commonly, the most obstinate
belief and persuasion." — This is the state
of mind which occurs in hypochondriasis, but which
also not unfrequently attends the disease which
is the subject of this essay. — The last part of the des-
cription just quoted, viz^t that in respect to all these
feelings & apprehensions there is commonly the
most obstinate belief & persuasion" will seldom ap-
ply to dyspepsia for in this disease the languor &
timidity can for the most part, be for a time, readily
dispelled. — It is not to be supposed that all these
symptoms occur in the same person at the same time
or even during the course of his disease, nor is it to



be understood that we have enumerated all the symptoms which may occur in dyspepsia, for a difference of constitution & other circumstances in the animal economy are adequate to the production of a much greater variety. The symptoms will also vary much in their degrees of violence in different cases and at different stages of the same case, being generally milder in the beginning, & more aggravated in proportion to their duration.

Remote causes.

The causes of dyspepsia are all such as induce general debility or debility of the stomach in particular — The most frequent are, excessive exercise or a too indolent and sedentary life, the operation of the depressing passions, as fear, grief, anxiety, or any uneasiness of mind, profuse evacuations, excessive venery, long fasting, intemperance in eating or drinking, excessive use of stimulating condiments, of warm diluent drinks, of coffee, tea, of tobacco or opium, decayed teeth frequent emetics immoderate



repletion of the stomach &c — To these might
be added imperfect secretion of saliva, bile or pan-
creatic juice with change or structure of the py-
lorus &c. but cases which depend upon organic af-
fection of the stomach itself, or upon disease of the
neighboring organs are not to be considered as cases
of idiopathic dyspepsia.

Proximate Cause. "The cure of diseases"
says the celebrated Edinburgh professor "is chiefly
and almost unavoiably founded in a knowledge
of their proximate causes." This is a truth which
with some limitation, will be assented to by all who
believe our noble art to be founded upon the broad
basis of reason. — The proximate cause of a dis-
ease is that circumstance, the removal of which ef-
fects its cure. — An imbecility or want of tone
in the muscular fibres of the stomach or of its se-
creting vessels or both we suppose to be the proximate
cause of dyspepsia, and upon this supposition our indica-
tions of cure will be founded.



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Diagnosis. The disease with which dyspepsia
would be most readily confounded is hypochondriasis.
They are thus distinguished by medical writers.

In hypochondriasis the affection of the mind is
greater, that of the stomach less than in dyspepsia.

Hypochondriasis is said to occur in the melancholic
temperament, and after the middle period of life;
dyspepsia more frequently in early life and in persons
of a sanguineous temperament. The former is in-
creased as age advances, the latter is often dimen-
ished. "In dyspepsia" says the author we have before
cited "there is more of spasmodic affection, and
the affection of the mind is often absent, and when pres-
ent is perhaps always of a slighter kind, while in hypo-
chondriasis, the affection of the mind is more con-
stant, and the symptoms of dyspepsia or the affection
of the stomach are often absent, or when present are
in a slighter degree."

Appearances on Dissection.

Upon the examination of persons who die after



the long continuance of dyspeptic symptoms, the
pylorus or lower orifice of the stomach is often found
contracted, ulcerated or schirous, and the stomach it-
self much distended with air. — In the 3^d. vol.
of Dr. Cox's Medical Museum, is to be found an ac-
count given by Dr. E. D. Smith of Charleston S. C.,
of a case in which tumor and pain in the lower part
of the left side of the abdomen gave rise to the suppo-
sition that the spleen was enlarged. Mercury was
prescribed without advantage. A blister applied pro-
duced symptoms of violent delirium. The man after
lingering some months died, and on dissection pre-
sented the following appearances: "The Liver, kidneys,
&c. presented no unusual appearance. The thorax
was examined but no disorder could be traced in any
of its viscera. The large vessels proceeding from
the heart were collapsed and natural. Upon opening
* From the circumstance of his having fallen from ^{the}
a height some time previous to his illness it was
thought an aneurism might exist.



the tumor (which was formed by the stomach) / " / was discovered in the lower part of it, probably owing to an inverted peristaltic motion. The pylorus was much contracted in size and discolored. The different coats of the stomach were obliterated, and presented a disagreeable appearance to the eye. The texture of the viscus was hard and gummy, and the cavity was contracted to one fourth its natural size."

Of the Cure

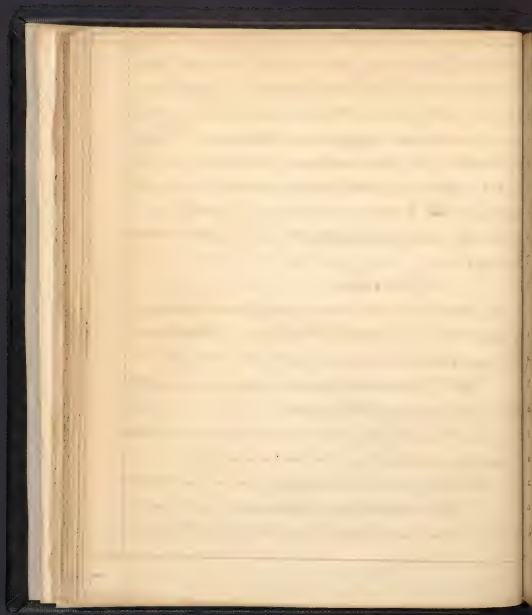
In treating of the cure of dyspepsia we will follow the example of Dr. Cullen, and others, in laying down three several indications.

The 1st of these is to remove as far as we are able, the remote causes of the disease,

The 2nd is to obviate or remove those symptoms which tend to continue or increase it, and

The 3^d to restore the impaired tone of the stomach.

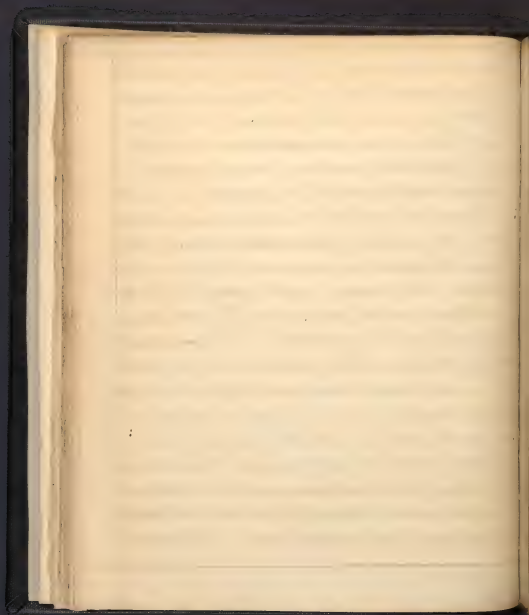
The importance of attending diligently to the first must be obvious, on the slightest view.



for while the causes of the disease continue to act,¹²
it is impossible that any impression can be made
upon it by medicine, or if we could even remove
it under these circumstances, its recurrence upon
leaving off the use of medicine would be certain.

The first step towards the accomplishment of this
indication, is, to impress the mind of our patient
with a strong sense of its absolute necessity. Unless
this can be done, our endeavors to work a cure,
however well directed, will be altogether fruitless.

We are next to point out to him the manner
in which this is to be effected. "If he leads a
fashionable life it will be necessary for him to forsake
the haunts & habits of dissipation: to leave the crowded
city and its alluring amusements, conducted in
rooms, where the air he breathes is vitiated and
contaminated by the great number of persons col-
lected together, to shun luxurious tables, indolence,
and late hours, to retrace the footsteps by which he
had deviated from simple nature; and to count



the country, pure air, moderate exercise, early rising,¹³
simple diet the society of a few select friends, and
pleasing occupations. But to return to his former
simple & natural mode of life will not now be sufficient.

The stomach debilitated by long disease is no longer ca-
pable of bearing the pile & hearty meal in which a man
in health may with impunity indulge. Even a moderate
meal of miscellaneous food overpowers it and is rejec-
ted. The meals should be small & repeated at short
intervals. It is of importance that regularity should be
observed both as to the quantity of food, and the time of
eating. The food should be of the most simple & digestible
kind. Vegetables, except of the farinaceous kind, as
being apt to produce acrescency, should as much as pos-
sible be avoided. But in the choice of food, the patient
might be guided in some measure by his own experience,
rejecting those articles which he finds to disagree with
him & vice versa - Much dilution should be avoided
as a concentrated state of the gastric juice is neces-
sary to produce the proper assimilation of the food.



Digestion is to be favored by rest after eating, and by friction over the region of the stomach before it, until some degree of redness & warmth is excited. For this purpose if the hand alone is insufficient, stimulating oils may be very properly applied. Dr Kinglake, in a communication on dyspepsia to the Editors of the Medical & Physical Journal "insists much on the advantages resulting from a certain domestic plan of management" and on the inefficiency of the usual plan by tonics & stomachics without its co-operation.

He states that he is warranted in expecting that its solitary adoptions would in general render the conjoint employ of medicine unnecessary in the cure of dyspeptic disorders. The treatment alluded to consists in cautiously avoiding mechanical work, as well as to the needs of digestion, & counteracting that stomachic languor and indolence which preclude the salutary secretion of gastric juice; an agent so indispensably necessary to the due decomposition and assimilation of alimentary substances.



"Extensive experience" he continues "has now fully¹⁵
confirmed the important fact, that the worst states
of dyspepsia arising from defect in stomachic exci-
tability and gastric secretion, are accompanied with
organic lesion may be effectually remedied by an
appropriate regard to the quantity of diet taken at
a time, to suitable mastication, friction over the region
of the stomach and the avoidance of costiveness."

He limits the quantity of aliment to be taken by his pa-
tient at one time, to two ounces, confines him chiefly
to animal food, particularly mutton & pork, and en-
joins that this food should be masticated until by
comminution and salivary commixture it be redu-
ced to a state of semifluidity. This meal he allows
to be repeated every three hours. He forbids diluent
fluids at the time of eating and until one hour after
each repast, and limits the quantity of fluid to be
taken in three hours to half a pint. About half an
hour previous to eating he directs brisk friction
to be made with a flesh brush over the region of



the stomach every ten minutes, and a similar ¹⁶ operation to follow it. Of the manner of obviating costiveness we will speak hereafter —

The most common symptoms which it is the object of the 2^d intention or indication to remove, are flatulency, morbid acidity, eructus in the stomach and costiveness.

Flatulency may be relieved by the use of that class of medicines termed carminatives, such as *Oleum Anisi*, *Mentha*, *Pulegii* &c —

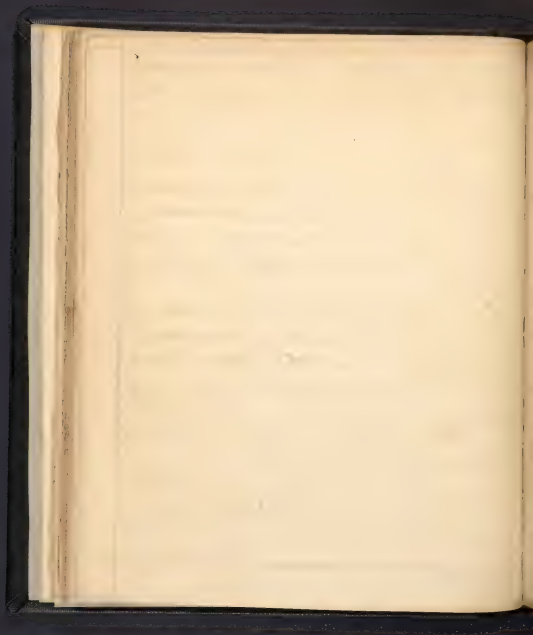
Morbid acidity, the effects of which are heart burn, gnawing pain of the stomach, acid eructation, &c is to be obviated by the cautious use of absorbents, of which the *argua calcis* is perhaps the best, and a rigorous attention to diet, avoiding everything likely to become acid in the stomachs!

Eructus in the stomach, the effect of debility in that organ, are to be removed by gentle emetics.

To obviate costiveness, is an object which the physician should constantly have in view, in the



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treatment of dyspepsia. The connection between
the stomach and intestines is such that a torpor
or inaction existing in the one, is inevitably commu-
nicated to the other — In order to establish a
regular discharge of the contents of the intestines
it is of the first importance, that an invariable cus-
tom of periodically soliciting an evacuation by
voluntary efforts should be instituted. These efforts
should on no occasion be omitted. They should at
each trial be continued for ten or fifteen minutes,
if the peristaltic motion be not sooner excited; and
the trials should be persevered in for a week, a fort-
night, or if that should not be sufficient, for a
month. If these attempts should at last prove inef-
fectual, we must resort to the use of laxative medi-
cines. The choice of these is of importance & requires
much of the physicians attention — As any cop-
ious evacuation or active purging would be followed
by debility of the intestines, we should choose such
as would merely keep the bowels in their natural



tate of laxity — Those medicines which stimulate principally the lower intestines are perhaps best adapted to the fulfilment of this intention.

Equal parts of Lac. Sulph. & Mag. Cal. are highly recommended by prof. Chapman.

Our Dr. & Cast, and we may add proper curative indication is to restore the impaired tone of the stomach — The treatment under this indication is of two kinds viz 1. such as directly & primarily increases the tone of the stomach itself, and

2. Such as by operating first upon the system in general and increasing its tone adds strength to this organ.

For the accomplishment of the first, we call to our aid, all that numerous & invaluable class of medicines called Tonic or tonics. Of these the chalybeates, Peruvian bark, colombo, gentian, quinine, the mineral acids, bilis bovina &c are in high estimation. The *Sipulus communis* or common hop, & some of the mineral tonics beside those mentioned, have of late been much recommended.



The herb as being possessed of a narcotic quality is perhaps adapted to those cases in which there is much pain or watchfulness. As a narcotic it is sometimes preferable to opium, as not having the same tendency to induce costiveness. — The white oxide of Bismuth has within a few years, been spoken of in terms of high commendation as a medicine in dyspepsia, and especially for the relief of spasmodic pains, gastrodynia, pyrosis, and other troublesome affections of the stomach.

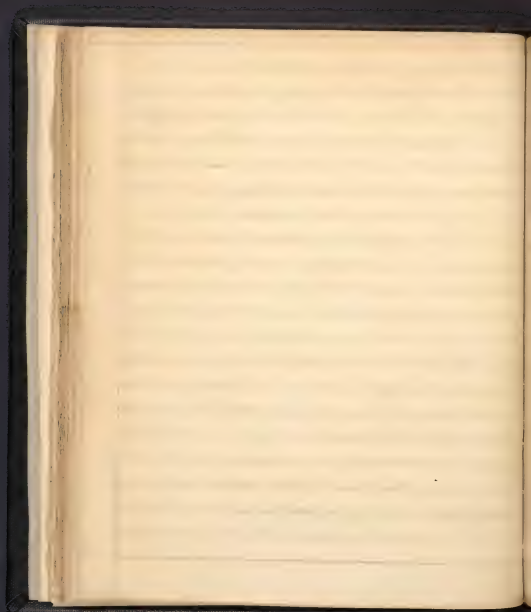
Dr. Moore of N. York published in 1816 "an inaugural dissertation on the medicinal virtues of the white oxide of Bismuth" &c in which he gives abstracts from cases related by Drs. Marcet & Bardsley, and some cases which came under his own observation in which this medicine had been employed with very happy effects.

It has also employed extensively on the continent of Europe, and by some others in our own country with similar results. Its dose is from gr.ij ad gr.x, with about xxv gr. of Gum. Tragacanth, or Gum Arabic, to be repeated three times per diem.



The Sulphate of Alumine & Potash or common alum I have known to be employed with very beneficial effects. A person who had been for years afflicted with dyspeptic symptoms and who had gone through the usual routine of stomachic or tonic medicines, together with an attenuating course of Mercury with but slight or temporary advantages took this ~~course~~ times a day half a wine glass full of a solution of Alum. The effect was an immediate improvement in the state of his health which preceded the relief of all his unpleasant symptoms. This effect continued under the constant use of the medicine for some months, but then gradually wore off, and the patient has now relapsed into his former unhappy and almost hopeless condition. It had been apprehended from the astringent power of the alum, that costiveness might be induced by it, but the patient and his physician were much gratified to find that the bowels were kept in a favorable state of openness. — Other cases have been related to me by persons worthy of credit in which its good effects have been more permanent.

These medicines varies in their doses and manner



circulation conforming with the treatment advised for the accom-
plishment of the first indication will of use with caution we are
fear of affording much relief and in many cases will effect cure.

But great caution in their exhibition is indeed necessary for
experience has abundantly shown that their long continued use de-
calitates instead of giving tone to the stomach. The frequent and
unlimited use of aromatics trochiscs &c. are often followed by the
great relief they procure is extremely pernicious & ought to
be avoided. Used sparingly at the time of caling they may be service-
able by enabling the stomach to perform its function for the time being.
But the mode of restoring the tone of the stomach is by the use
of those means which operating first on the system in general resto-
ring its tone thereby add strength to this organ. The principal
remedies of this class are exercise, and the application of cold.

Exercise, beside its general tonic effect, is peculiarly use-
ful in these cases, on account of its tendency to excite the action
of the vessels on the surface of the body, between which and the
stomach, there subsists a strong sympathy or consent—

The degree of exercise should never go so far as to induce
fatigue as this would produce an effect directly contrary



to that we desire. — Different species of exercise should be devised for those affected with different degrees of debility so that it may be continued a considerable length of time without inducing weariness. For the patient who is much reduced the different kinds of gestation are most suitable as sailing, riding in a carriage, on horseback &c. —

Walking and manual labor are to be practised by him who has as yet lost but little of his natural strength.

Cold applied either dry or by cold affusion, has also a tonic effect on the perspiratory vessels, and sympathetically on the stomach, and is therefore in many cases an useful remedy in this disease. — If bathing is recommended it is thought best in such cases to begin with the tepid bath, and to reduce the temperature gradually. — A flannel shirt in winter & muslin in summer are preferable to linen, on account of their keeping the temperature more uniform.

It is proper that the minds of dyspeptic patients should be always occupied and amused.

The benefit derived by patients of this description, while attending public baths and watering places

It is a common saying that the world is a stage
and that we are but players in it. This is a true
saying, for we are all actors in the great drama
of life. Each of us has a part to play, and
it is our duty to play it well. We must
be true to ourselves and to the world.
We must be honest and brave, and we must
do our best. For in the end, it is not
the things we have done, but the things we
have become, that will matter. We must
be good, we must be kind, we must be
true. For this is the only way to
live. For this is the only way to
be happy. For this is the only way
to be a man.

is to be attributed as much to the exercise and amusement of their minds by change of scene and agreeable company as to any medicinal virtues the water may possess. —

At the time of the
of the month of June 1861
the day of the month of June 1861
the day of the month of June 1861